


CORADDI



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CORADDI

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Spring 1995
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Illustrations in *Deer and Hunters* by Verniesa Allen

Not all work printed in this issue was subject to jury.



Denman Wall: *The Trees*, charcoal on paper

Deer and Hunters

Yulia Borodyanskaya

Once when I was nine, I knew what love was. It became a shared knowledge between me and two of my girl friends, Nastya and Sasha. The three of us figured it out.

That year we spent most of our time at school, from early morning until evening, when our parents got off work and came to pick us up. There was a special after-school group organized for the ones like us who lived far away and could not walk home by ourselves. The supervisor who stayed with us had a plump wart above her upper lip, and always pleaded for our attention, saying: "Listen here!" If it was not for that wart and her funny grammar, the woman would be hardly noticeable. She usually left us alone to roam the school building and the territory around it. But first we would race to get the homework done as fast as possible. After standing in line to get her approval—a big check mark in red pencil on the margins—we would get out of the classroom and go wherever we wished. "Only do not go behind the fence!" the wart-woman would instruct. And we did not. There was too much to do within the fenced grounds.

Nastya, Sasha and I always fled from the rest of the girls, who played skipping-rope, drew cartoon characters on the asphalt

with colored chalk, and braided each other's hair. We did not join the boys either—all they ever did was play soccer. We made up our own games.

When spring came, our favourites were "The Spy," "Deer and Hunters," and "The Three Musketeers." Outside, the red brick of the school building blended with the brown of last year's rotten leaves. The fence was an old concrete grating shaped into a lacy pattern with few holes in it, big enough for escape. The world outside the school grounds seemed so far away then, the school and the yard creating a quiet niche, securing us from the traffic and noise of St. Petersburg.

We knew the place better than anyone else, except maybe the janitors. There were chipped front steps painted red, a soccer field with two basketball hoops, a row of private garages which were easy to climb, aligned along the fence. Everything presented itself as a generous offering to our imaginations.

Playing "The Three Musketeers" was not easy without horses, so Nastya suggested climbing an old apple tree: she claimed it for her horse. She even called it "Horse." That's just how she was: she'd come up with something new and make the best

of it. Sasha and I could never catch up.

I picked the tree next to Nastya's, a big sturdy one with many branches spread out comfortably for climbing. That was my "Fork." I was the nice one among us, and reserved Sasha a tree too, but she was afraid to tear up her dress, and never climbed up. Every time we played, Nastya would take her fitted black wool apron off, and stay in the itchy brown dress with pleated skirt and white collar and cuffs. That was our uniform, so hated and never washed often enough. Sasha somehow managed to keep her collar and cuffs clean, her hair in accurate page-boy cut. She was the neat one, and I fit right in between them: tidy at first, I got disheveled after a few minutes of running around. Nastya pulled her thick dishwater-blond strands of hair into a tight braid, tied it with a dark ribbon, and let it dangle between her shoulder blades. Then she was ready to play.

One spring day, not long before the school recess, we were making a round of our property. "Let's climb the garages," said Nastya, and hurried on towards them. She knew we would not follow her, and even though she did not care, we always followed her, as if Sasha and I could not come up with a good idea.

Up on the garages, it smelled of tar and blooming bird cherries. The roofs were covered with bird dung, trash, and chalk writings: swear words, love confessions, and promises of revenge. "You just wait!" read one, written in bright yellow spray paint. It could be anything, a threat or a promise, but Nastya insisted upon suspense. "Maybe someone is going to kill somebody, here,

tonight!" she gasped. She loved the idea, but I just went on along the roofs, picking up fallen cherry flowers and sucking nectar out of the petals.

When I returned, I saw Sasha choosing a clean spot among the writings and sitting down. The sun shone straight on her, warming up her wool dress and thick cotton stockings. "Aren't you hot?" I asked her. She said she did not mind the heat, and started reading scribbled love notes over again, whispering the names out loud. "That's silly," I said. "If I liked someone, I would not write about it all over the place."

"Yes, you would." Nastya leaped down from the tree that grew right next to the garages, where she was hidden among the green-covered branches.

"You just want to argue with me, Nastya!" I was annoyed.

"Well, you just wait," she said.

The next day we got into trouble. Not "we," but Nastya, of course. Sasha and I just followed her. Before doing homework, she led us to the cafeteria to get some black bread for a snack. We really were supposed to pay for it, a kopek for a slice, but a sliced loaf sitting out in a tray near the doorway was tempting. So easy to steal. Nastya waited for the cafeteria workers to go into the kitchen, grabbed a stack of thick slices, and winked at us: "Hurry up!" I counted off three pieces from the pile, and shoved them behind the front

of my apron. Sasha did not take any.

We ran, faster and faster, afraid of our own footsteps echoing in the corridors. When we reached our classroom, we burst into laughter: what a scare it was! During the



study time, Nastya kept rolling balls out of her bread. She kneaded soft pieces with her fingers, until they became more and more like clumps of grayish plaster, and sealed the balls' roundness with saliva. I sat next to her at the desk, pretending to be studious. Then Nastya started popping the bread balls into her mouth, and playing finger soccer with the last one remaining on the desk. Crumbs were covering her apron and notebooks. Next thing I saw was our supervisor, quietly approaching us.

"What is it that you have there?" Her voice sounded unusually sharp. I looked at Nastya with horror and saw her smile innocently at the supervisor, while swallowing the bread ball without chewing. I could almost trace its shape going down her throat, and I hugged my own bread closer to my chest.

"You should not play with the bread wasting it like this. Look at all this mess! You will have to stay after you are done with homework, and clean up," she said walking away. "On second thought, don't go outside at all, you should learn for the future not to play with your bread." She turned around. Nastya stuck her bread-covered tongue at her.

Of course we stayed with Nastya, out of solidarity. Upstairs, on the third floor, there was a big assembly hall with dusty parquet laid out in a checkered pattern, and a stage with an old piano next to it. That's where we dragged ourselves: Nastya—as if nothing had happened, and I with a hidden grudge against her. I'd much rather have been outside. Sasha stayed in the classroom, finishing up her homework.

When we approached the glass doors, I could hear the out-of-tune arpeggios played on the piano and two voices singing in a duet. "Hush!" I hissed at Nastya. "Don't stomp so loud. Let's see what's going on here." We squatted so that we could not be seen above the wooden panel on the bottom

of the side door, and peeped through the corner of the glass.

There was a couple at the piano, a guy playing and singing with a girl, who led the melody of the song. Her voice sounded stronger than his, more self-assured. I listened to the words. They blurred together, but I could figure out the refrain:

"I will never forget you

And I will never see you again."

I rose up a little, and pressed my forehead against the glass. I could not see their faces, but I could tell that they were older students, maybe even seniors, wearing navy blue uniforms instead of our brown and black ones. Never before had we seen anyone but our small school group stay at school that late.

I picked up the tune of the refrain, and started to sing along, quietly. Pushing the door too hard, I made it squeak loudly. The girl swiftly turned around, spotted the two of us, and tugged the guy by his sleeve. My face flushed. I felt embarrassed, frightened, but most of all, disappointed, as if we had interrupted some kind of magic by spying on their secret. The guy got up, awkwardly patted the girl on the shoulder, and they walked out the opposite end of the hall. It felt empty without them.

"I know them, I know them!" Nastya smiled at me triumphantly, as soon as they left. "They are my older sister's friends, they are 'Lena+Alex=Love,' from the garage roof!"

"So what?" I said. "I still think it's silly to write such things."

We kept coming to the assembly hall when we got tired of the outside. Then Nastya invented a game of "Deer and Hunters." We teamed up with two guys, Alexy and Andrei, who were too much trouble for the rest of our after-school group. They became our "hunters." Hiding under the rows of chairs and long curtains in the hall, in ambush, they would jump out and "shoot" at us. There weren't any guns, so

they had to chase and touch us with a hand; only after that would we be claimed dead.

I loved the game, but Sasha complained some about her hands getting tired from holding them up above her head for too long.

"You bend your arms in at the elbows, make the outsides of the wrists touch, and spread the fingers out. Then it'll still look like the deer's horns," instructed Nastya.

"A girl-deer doesn't have such big horns," insisted Sasha. "I'll be a girl deer." At the time, neither of us knew that female deer don't have any horns.

So we played, and after many times of being killed, I got really nimble, and almost as good as Nastya, and the guy's hand hardly touched me during a long game. Alexey was not very fast, he did not care if he missed, but Andrei clenched his teeth and only ran faster when the "deer" slipped from under his hand. And if he caught me, he wouldn't leave me alone. Once he held me by my apron straps and pulled my ponytail so hard I kicked him in his stomach. Then Andrei started following me around everywhere.

I complained to the supervisor, but she only said, "He is just ten, guys are like that at his age." I thought then that I was not much older, but I didn't go around following someone like a puppy. "Maybe he likes you," added the supervisor with a smirk.

On a day when Nastya stayed at home with a cold, and Sasha left home early, I went to the garages by myself. The bird cherry blossoms were gone, and recent rains had washed away some of the writings. The roofs looked bare. I reread all that remained, and found a writing from Alex and Lena. I could hardly figure it out, so I found a piece of whitewash near the drain at the edge of the roof, and traced the big uneven letters of their names. I stared at the bright white against the dark of the roof for a while, and then, in the corner where the roof met the

wall of the neighbouring building, wrote down mine and Andrei's initials, putting a big plus between them.

Nastya ran up to me two days later after class. "You wrote it!" She was puzzled. "Why did you? Didn't you swear you wouldn't write such silly stuff?"

"So I did," I said. "I changed my mind. I can do whatever I want, can't I?"

"But you don't really like him, do you?" she asked.

"Maybe I do," I said.

"Prove it then!" Nastya exclaimed.

"But how?" I felt nervous.

"You will have to kiss him. Will you?" she asked. I knew that if I gave in that time, I'd lose. Some little cartoon devil jumped around in my head, setting me on. That time I wanted to be the leader, even though I did not have a clear explanation for my spontaneous roof writing. So to Nastya's



question I answered, "Fine."

There were two cellars for the gardening utilities on both sides of the school building, with a few steps surrounded by banisters, which hid the entrances to the storage rooms in underground darkness. Nastya said it would be a perfect place for Andrei and me; no one could see us there. I wanted to choose the spot myself, but Nastya was right about the cellar. She wanted to stay on the top of the stairs while we were down there; she said she had to see us kiss, just to make sure I did not lie to her. I went along with these rules; I decided that I would still be stronger in what I was going to do than Nastya. I was going to talk Andrei into going down to the cellar with me; it could not be hard. I would say there was something interesting I wanted to show him there. Sasha refused to be part of the plan, but promised to look around and let us know in case the supervisor, or anyone else, would be approaching the cellar.

I was waiting for the school day to be over, with nervous excitement: for better or for worse, I was going to take charge. After the last class I came up to Andrei and told him I found a rusted cartridge case from the Second World War at the bottom of the cellar steps. It could have been true: guys were finding those cases all over the school grounds, and I heard Andrei talk about the war with others a whole lot.

Andrei followed me obediently. I was afraid for him to start asking me questions, but he was quiet, as always when around me. From the corner of my eye I could see Nastya following us, keeping a safe distance. When we went down the stairs, I could hear her crawl closer to the banister. After we got used to the darkness, I noticed a big lock hanging on the door into the cellar. We could not go in. "Where is it?" asked Andrei. I started feeling frightened again, but still leaned down to the ground, pretending to search for the promised cartridge. I

mumbled something about losing it, while he stood next to me patiently. Then I rose up quickly, stretched out to my full height and even lifted my heels above the ground (Andrei was a little taller than me). I pecked his cheek with my lips, shaped like a little bow tie: I saw a girl do so on TV, in an afternoon children's movie. She was trying to kiss a giraffe, though.

Andrei remained standing in one spot, and then I continued smacking my lips, switching from one of his cheeks to the other. I was so afraid for him to say something that I did not stop, until I heard Nastya's voice, counting in a whisper. I stopped and looked up: she was leaning over the banister, and looking at me with what I knew to be amusement, and relief. I was relieved to see her, too. Andrei laughed awkwardly.

As we were growing up, I asked Nastya to keep this story in secret: others would not understand my courage, I thought then. But for myself I was proud of chasing down the hunter, it made me feel strong, as strong as Nastya. I want the writings to remain on the garage roofs; they are ephemeral, they show me love and friendship I can find for myself. Love does not have to be hunted down, that I learned. But for a nine-year-old, it was still only a game.



Photograph courtesy of University Archives/Jackson Library, UNCG



Beth Aronson: *Satchmo in my Living Room*, charcoal on paper

Evening IV

Stuart Dischell

Walking the long blocks home after work
On my feet I am the child coming from school.
An embarrassing thought the way it means
My wife's my mother and not my daughter's.

Late autumn evening the sun quits early,
The porch lights blur, and the leaf-
Strewn sidewalks alert family dogs
To your presence along the property lines.

This is good you believe, another proof
Your existence on earth is not wholly imagined,
Like those late night talks in the common room
. . . if I died in the city and nobody saw me.

If I die in the city and nobody claims me,
Let four trash collectors haul away my body,
Leave me rot in the pit at the edge of the city.
Tell them I was born to be great but never born.

(Greensboro)

Stuart Dischell has been a Visiting Writer at UNCG since 1992. He is the author of *Good Hope Road*, a 1991 National Poetry Series Selection, and *Evenings & Avenues*, forthcoming. He will join the English faculty at New Mexico State University this fall.

Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess

Kimberly Holzer

If only the good die
young,
then I've got a
long time
to make all the necessary arrangements.
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess
I'll be.
Overestimated overanalyzed overwrought overagonized
by college professors who never loved me
or my stuff
'til I died in a silver flash—
broke my neck turning cartwheels
down the front steps of the White House
while wrapped in a burning flag
just to say that
I did.

"OH MY STARS SHE'S DEAD,"
will read the headlines next day,
"Dead Cremated Poof All At The Same Time
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess
Dead Gone Poof In A Flash Of Hair
Poof Went The Poetess
Bye Bye Lyrical One."
And I'll be so glad I'm dead
so I won't have to read all the
crap
they obituate about me.
Portraying me as so much sweeter
than I really was
honoring more virtue
than I ever did
with bigger breasts
than I ever had.
"She Died In A 38-D Cup
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess
Big Burning Boobs Wrapped In A Fiery Flag."

Now there's a hell of a statement.

Oh, and the wake. . .
A priest
excommunicated

blackballed by the Pope himself
for sex with a lady parishioner
proud of what she'd done—
I want a guy like that to lead the procession
with the ashes in a coffee can
cause I'm in no mood to be
biodegradable.
And won't the mourners be happy when they see the sign,
"FREE BEER IF YOU'RE WEARING BLACK.
SEE BARTENDER.
NO LIMIT."
Hundreds of drunks who never knew me
throwing licorice ropes instead of flowers
into the hole as they lower
the coffee can,
"Man, she was awesome.
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess."
Lay a big chalkboard where the granite should be,
engraved for all the visitors to see,
"Kim Can't Come Up Right Now, So
Leave A Message."

More headlines!
Give me even MORE headlines!
May Americans read at the supermarket checkout lane,
"Fiery Poetess Dies In Fireball!"
"Elvis Sighted At Poetess Burial!"
"Aliens Plunder Poetess Coffee Can;
Leave Mysterious Obscenities On Chalkboard"

Eccentric wannabes will throw themselves from
White House stairs,
"We want to die like her!"
Another silly fad, with the
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess Dolls,
T-shirts,
Bumper stickers.

And I'll be so glad I'm dead.
Dust in a coffee can
Worms feasting on licorice ropes.
Another Dead Twentieth-Century Poetess
"OH MY STARS SHE'S DEAD,
but she sure made a hell of a statement."

Coffee

Gregg Carroll

The man drinks coffee
and reads a book on horticulture
and thinks that it is not a good
time to die in what he knows.

Steam drifts free from his coffee.

He ponders the eroticism
of kissing his sister on the lips
and the closeness of lovers
during oral sex.

Soap residue casts a rainbow
across the top of his mug.

Was it when he was ten
and he watched the motion
of his babysitters breasts
as she exercised on a stairmaster
that he first became aware,
or was it seeing his aunt
naked and wet from shower
when he was six.
It was too late to care.

He sips fully.

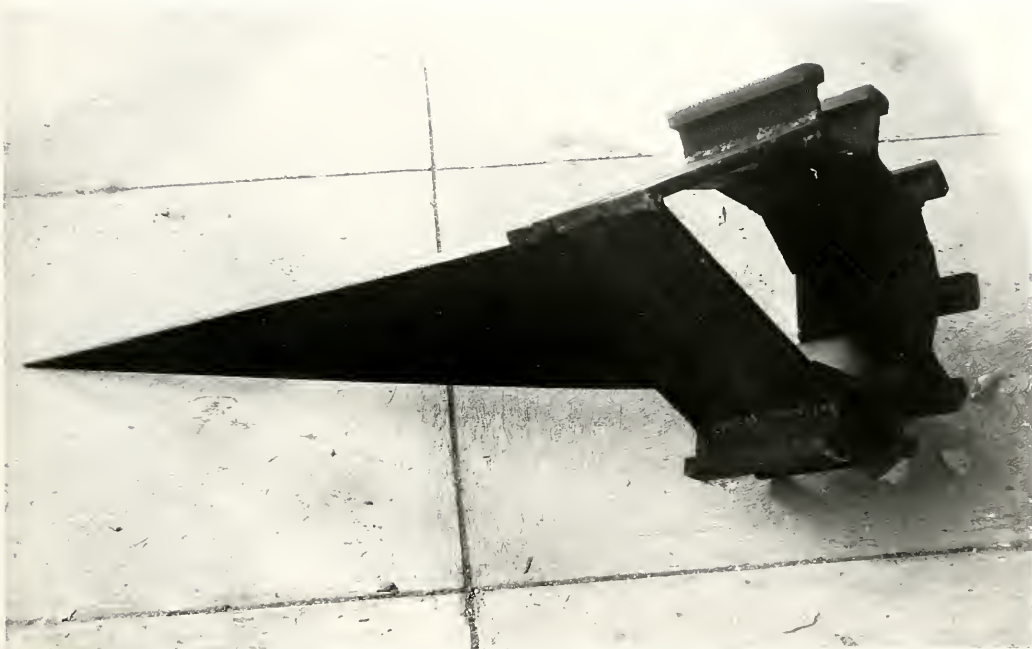
A friend had once told him,
"Never love somebody more
than they love you"
but relationships for him
had never seemed so spit-shined
or two-dimensional.
It was always like forcing
fingers through the skin
and between the ribs.

The last sips are always the sweetest.

He curses his aunt and his babysitter,
along with his heart and his need.
He curses the fact that love
always came to him with words

that Hitler or Stalin might have used.

"There is so much comfort in flowers"
he says, "and all they need is sun and water."
He can give that.



Jon Smith: *Holy Roller*, steel

Fire in the Fields

Sascha Dallas

The leafy vines curled through the broken teeth of ploughs
leaning against the slanted barns like sorrow.
I had seen those fields still and then charging forward
under the wind ever since I was a child,
believing that a sea-monster swam through the wheat fields
which swallowed horses and chewed on rust.
Shy tractors were awake upon command;
their mechanical hearts growling and drumming upon the earth.
Their sleek metal bodies gave them an appearance of grandeur,
as though they were knights of the fields.
I knew the earth had made a covenant with the sky
because at noon, when the sun was highest,
I could hear the day breathing as though it could speak.
When the thunder came, the silence of the earth
was inhaled by the clouds in a gulp,
and the raindrops tapped on flattened grass.
I knew Eden was not so far from there
because the sun set the earth on fire one hot day,
and we had to leave the fields,
but they grow inside me still.



Adele Deaton: *Oak Hill Ivy*, photograph



Monica Rief: *Soma*, Hydrocal on styrofoam

Indiana 1974, The Hollow

Chuck Turner

It was a strange wilderness made
between the two of us in a summer kitchen,
I remember.

You barely breathing and I
feeding on this silence where
gulps became a sudden charge of emotion.

It was your father's stroke
that brought you here.
I wondered what you
thought. What it must have been like.

You, who had never seen rust
or stood that close to death
dragged into lives without permission. You

who sat that day
by an empty fireplace, in a dusty chair
600 miles outside of Chicago
and thought how lives can be

instantly changed. You
who would now think daily of these fields,
compare the golden stalks to street lights
and in this unfamiliar begin

to depict your own slow dying. In time
your father's voice became louder,
how you waited, swallowed
as if first to hear your own.

Kepler

David Teague

She sees the letters of ancient Greece
scrawled in his thick Oxford hand, the ink
perfect and black. The egg shells of his curves
seem more natural than fruit or spiraling branches.
The names of Roman gods, Mercury, Jupiter,
Mars, the warrior, fall from his pen and record
the journey of a thousand-year-old light, guiding
ships in the rough dark seas.

His quick parabola drawn for her, as if to explain
what he cannot say, the ellipse that encircles his
face, the two blue foci twinkling and alive,
watching her enthralled. He draws curves for her
when she sneaks from her mother's circling hands.
The stars high and bright, giving sight
to the candle's waxing shadows.

Then his hands on her, his lips pressed into the
arc of her neck. She is paralyzed, confused, but
he explains in numbers, sketching a perfect circle that
tightens around them. Binding and dazzling her, the giant
planets orbiting above, moons laughing and lighting his
face for her to see.

Then the circle breaks and she is sent spinning out like
a comet away from him. Her mother at the doorway, the
sun eclipsing the stars in its blue blanket behind her, and
he covers his face with his hands, repeating over and over
too soft to hear that she must never tell.



Kerry Horne: *Helmet #3, steel*



Kerry Horne: *Helmet #4, steel*



Denman Wall: *The Reclining Man*, charcoal on paper

Upon Looking at a Map of Pamlico Sound

Sean Butler

There was never just the sound of water
without the name;

Never just the gray or blue or white of
noon shades.

The shallows had to lighten and blue,
as tropical shades will do,
to the sound of the "o."

The waters were not blue in
the Sound of the Mind
before the poet came with the music
of names.

The ripples did not ring silver and gold,
nor did the wave-rocked reeds
dance to the Cancito of "ico" and "pam."

The Sound is a Tune
held by the rhythm of ebb and neap,
And this is a dancing eddy,
a waltz of tides that nightly glides
to paint such watery pictures
as the shimmering timbrel of the moon.



Adele Deaton: *Fire Escape*, photograph

Herbs and Other Cures

Sarah Atkinson

I was sent to Lonata after the needle took my mom. I fought it. I said I could take care of myself just like I took care of Mom, but the courts wouldn't hear it and I was sent to live in a foster home in Lonata, a town with about as many people in it as the Guthrie Theatre during a sold out performance. Its flat wide open fields of corn and windy gravel roads were a change from the Minneapolis streets I was accustomed to, but I liked it fine.

Except, I thought the people there could sense my wickedness from the beginning. Everywhere I went people stared at me and whispered to their friends. Mrs. Anderson said it might be the purple in my hair that they were whispering about, or the way I always dressed in black, like I was in mourning. Valerie thought maybe it was the way I did my makeup, that the colors I chose weren't right for me and made my face look long and unfriendly. But that didn't make sense to me. It had to be something deeper.

I sensed from a very young age that I was different. When I was five or ten, I can't remember when exactly, I used to sit high up in trees without leaves and imagine myself, shadowy and veiled, a keeper of dark secrets. Mom said it was because I was a bastard that I felt different, that she was

sorry for bringing me into this world and if she could change things she would, but it was too late for that and all she could do now was learn to control things. That's why she needed the needle, she said, because sometimes things got so out of control something was needed to keep them from disassembling.

I knew what she was talking about. Once I cut an isosceles triangle in my arm with a sharp pencil during geometry class to keep my concentration from falling apart. But Mr. Sharmer broke it anyway when he grabbed my pencil, then my arm, and pulled me, screaming and kicking, down to the principal's office where I was disciplined. was required to sit alone in an empty classroom with the instructions to think about what I had done. They called Mom and she came in all dressed in green and smelling of spearmint gum. She grabbed my hand, squeezed it hard and said, "I love you, Maggie, my daughter, my beautiful daughter, I love you so much. I'm so sorry."

I told her not to be sorry, that it was me who should be sorry, that I didn't have control over my wickedness and now it had turned inward. She cried and hugged me and rocked me back and forth in her skinny arms. I told her not to worry, that I would

learn to discipline myself so I wouldn't make her cry anymore.

This is when I developed an interest in science. Science worked to solve the mysteries of life and present information in concrete, logical terms that could be tested and proven and controlled in laboratory situations. This appealed to me. The way I understood it then was that personality was nothing more than an assortment of genes, and emotions merely chemical formulas, something medicine could control. I went to the school nurse and asked for some medicine that could alter my genes or at least change my moods, but she said there was no such thing and what I needed wasn't medicine, but a mother. I told her she was wrong, it was a father I didn't have and how did she know what I needed anyway. She said she was sorry and she shouldn't have said that, but it gets so hard to treat people's pains sometimes.

I didn't understand what she meant then, but I do now. The last time I saw Mom she was in terrible pain; she was blue and swollen and swinging her arm against the couch trying to knock the needle out. When I came home and saw it I started kicking the wall over and over and over again. It didn't hurt, but Mom's crying did. And I couldn't make it stop. The paramedics came and took us both away. I healed, but Mom didn't.

After I could put weight on my foot again, I was moved to the fifth floor of the hospital where I had weekly meetings with a psychologist. He asked me what I thought I needed and I told him I needed to be left alone, that I was wicked and there was nothing that could make me different, except medicine maybe. I told him it would be best to keep me away from the others so

I wouldn't cause them harm and that it would be in his best interest to stay away too.

But he didn't listen and involved me in group activities such as communicating my emotions through hitting balloons and explaining what animal I felt like today and why. I swung at a balloon and accidentally hit another group member in the head so hard he fell over. I said I felt like a cockroach because they were always crawling around where nobody wanted them. The group said that a cockroach wasn't an animal, it was an insect, and couldn't I think of anything better to be. After

that, I refused any further participation. I told Dr. Rosenberg that I was born wicked and I needed some medicine to change the chemical formulas in my brain, that swatting at balloons and pretending I was an animal wasn't going to change the way I was. He said I was being belligerent and he couldn't help me until I was ready to be helped. I was then released to the custody of the Anderson family in Lonata, Minnesota.

The Andersons lived in a farm house about five miles out of town on County Road 11, a gravel road. They were a nice family, a husband and a wife who opened their doors to a young stranger. I had my own room on the second floor with blue lacy curtains and a bedspread and pillow cases that matched. It was real different from the downtown apartment I shared with Mom, but I liked it fine.

Mr. Anderson sold insurance and had an office downtown. Mrs. Anderson worked part-time arranging flowers at Greenbriar Florist. They raised a few chickens and grew giant green peas, beans and cucumbers in the backyard garden. Every night we sat down to a well balanced meal including



chicken, potatoes, a vegetable from the garden and milk. Chicken was the only meat they ever ate; outside of that they were regular folks.

I had to ride the bus to school so I had to be ready and waiting at the end of the driveway by 7:30 a.m. Valerie's house was the next stop after mine and we sat together most days because it felt right. Valerie told me that she was born in Lonata, but she always felt like she was supposed to have been born somewhere else, someplace with tall buildings and neon lights. I told her that she was probably born with a city gene and there wasn't much she could do but wait it out until graduation then go and find a place where her genes could be exposed to the stimuli they needed to properly express themselves. Like Minneapolis, or someplace bigger even, like Chicago. She liked this idea and started asking me a lot of questions I couldn't answer.

My first day at school is when I met Eddie. His locker was next to mine. I tried hard to avoid making eye contact with anyone because I was through causing harm, but Eddie spoke first.

"You from the cities?" he asked.

"Yeah, so?"

"Just wondering, you look different is all."

He was right. My skin was at least a shade darker than anybody else's and my hair black as coffee, except for the purple streaks. I was tall and skinny and unhealthy looking compared to most other girls in Lonata. But I already knew I was different so I didn't let it bother me. I kept to myself mostly. I figured I'd do my time in Lonata and when I graduated I'd move back to Minneapolis and get a job as a dancer at a Hennepin Avenue club. Meanwhile I'd do the best I could.

I took an interest in Eddie. I started watching him every chance I had. He was

always touching people; hugging them, patting their backs or grabbing their hands and waltzing them down the hall. I wondered what made him the way he was and decided to research his behavior. I bought a new notebook so I could chart Eddie's behavior. I recorded every movement: every sound he made, every look he gave and the precise times at which they occurred. I watched him in the mornings before school and in the afternoons during lunch hour. During the first week Eddie averaged about twenty-three social interactions per half hour between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. and forty-one social interactions per hour during lunch. This included verbal greetings, smiles, handshakes, hugs, etc. I averaged one, which was usually with Eddie. Without graphing the results, I concluded that people liked Eddie and they didn't like me and I wanted to know why.

About halfway through the second week of my research project I approached Eddie at lunchtime.

"You take any medicine?" I asked him. He smiled and motioned for me to sit down.

"Herbs," he said and pointed to his tea.

Eddie was tall and had big, muscular shoulders. He dressed in jeans and T-shirts and something about him sipping tea didn't seem right until you got close enough to see the softness of his curly brown hair and how it matched his smile.

"Where do you get the herbs?" I asked.

"My mom's an herbologist. She says sanicle leaves work to keep poison out of my body."

I leaned in close to Eddie's face. "You have poison in your body too?" I said.

"Sure. Everybody has poison in their body, most people just ignore it is all."

I told him about my poison, about how I was wicked and kept away from people so I couldn't harm them. I told him I thought it was a gene, but I was willing to try herbs.

He recommended that I get some wild yam root and drink it as a tea twice a day; once in the morning and once in the late afternoon.

When I got off the bus that afternoon I ran in the house and told Mrs. Anderson to put wild yam root on her food shopping list. She said, "No, I will not have herbs in this house, young lady." She said Eddie's family was weird and everyone in Lonata knew it. And furthermore, I should stay away from Eddie and try to make some nice friends.

I told Valerie about wild yam root on the bus the next afternoon and she said she might know where to find some and to meet her in the ditch where County Road 11 intersects with Highway 5 at 7:30 that night.

At 7:30 Valerie showed up on her dirt bike, I hopped on and we rode twenty minutes to the next town where we stopped at Maka's Mystic Herb and Rock Shop. The sign was carved in wood and hung from vines over a narrow alleyway entrance. Inside was Maka, mystic herbs and rocks. Maka was a tiny woman with long white hair. She wore leather sandals and was dressed in soft, white cotton. She smelled spicy, like freshly shredded ginger root.

"Welcome," she said and took my hands in hers. Her voice was soft like summer wind.

"I'm looking for wild yam root," I said.

"Of course," she said, "something to relax your mind."

"And get rid of the poison," I said.

She took my chin in her tiny hands and looked me straight in the eye. "You have such a sad looking face, my pretty little lady."

"It's the poison," I told her, "it makes me wicked."

"Ahh. You need herbs for the poison."

"Exactly," I said.

She pulled a small, cotton drawstring pouch out of a wooden drawer, filled it with sweet smelling herbs and pressed it in my

hands. "Sometimes, if the poison has been inside your body for a long time, the herb isn't enough." She pressed harder when she said this.

"What else?" I asked.

She put both her tiny wrinkled hands on my face and smiled, her soft summer breath warm on my face. She kissed my forehead strong and with purpose.

I thanked her for the herbs and waved from the dirt bike as Valerie pulled out of the alleyway. I held on tight and leaned into Valerie. I let my head rest on her cushioned back. Something about Valerie was so comfortable. At first I thought maybe it was her uniform plumpness or her cheery laughter, or the way she always dressed in shades of pink to match her baby cheeks. But that night on the motorcycle I thought of things like how she never looked away when I was talking, how she understood what I was saying. And even if she didn't, she listened anyway.

When Valerie dropped me off at the ditch she instructed me to keep this quiet because folks in Lonata thought bad things about herbs and if they found out I had them, they'd think bad things about me too. Since I was sure nobody thought good things about me, this didn't concern me much.

I told Eddie what Maka said about the herbs maybe not being enough to get real deep poison out of the body and he just smiled his soft smile. After I started taking the herb, Eddie really took to me. We started to eat lunch together almost every day. Sometimes in the morning before school he would ask if he could brush my hair and I'd let him. He brought me things like peppermints and snap dragons. We started to hold hands a lot, but when he tried to kiss me I had to stop and remind him about what Maka said. I told him that we probably shouldn't touch for a while. Eddie said maybe we didn't need to touch, maybe we could just stand close enough to feel the

warmth that floats above the skin. I felt fire in my thighs when Eddie said this, but I had to say no.

After three days like this, I started having moods. I found myself wanting to be near Eddie, wanting to touch his hair and trace the shape of his hand with my own. I bought him bubble gum and tiny balloons with messages like "Thinking of You" and "I miss you" on them that I left in his locker before school. I recorded music for him to listen to that might help him understand how I thought about him all the time, but until I was sure the herb was working, I had to stay away.

Valerie said that was good. That's what *Seventeen* magazine said to do. Be mysterious, it'll make him crazy for you. I told her that was a bunch of trash and if weren't for this poison I'd be giving Eddie a lot more than bubble gum. She said that according to *Mademoiselle* bad girls were out and I should probably refuse sex until at least six months into the relationship. I told her that's not what I meant and it didn't make sense to me to keep yourself away from somebody you wanted to be near. "Why you staying away from Eddie then?" she said. The only thing I could think to say was "Because." Then I added that those magazines are stupid and if she didn't stop reading them she was going to get stupid too. And anyway, maybe it was her I needed to stay away from.

I knew right when I said it that I didn't mean it, but it was too late. Valerie was shaking in the seat next to me. I wiped her tears with my sleeve then held both my hands up as close to her face as I could without touching her.



"What are you doing?" she asked.
"Feeling the warmth of your skin."
"You can feel without touching?"
"Yeah."

She closed her eyes and sat still as a totem pole.

"So can I."

We made peace and she gave me more advice about Eddie. She said maybe what I needed was some new underwear or a lacy bra maybe. She had read in *Cosmo* about how wearing sexy underclothes could make you feel different—sensuous, desirable; but I knew I needed more than fancy panties to change the way I felt.

That night when I was alone in my blue room, I tried on the purple flannel shirt that Mrs. Anderson had bought for me because she liked the way it matched my hair. She was trying. It looked nice, but I didn't feel right wearing it. The Andersons were nice people but I didn't feel right being there. I took off the shirt, threw it in the closet and paced around the room with just my jeans on. I pulled the bedspread off the bed and tore the curtains down. I wrapped myself in the lacy blue and spun circles in front of the mirror as I opened my arms and closed my arms and opened my arms and closed my arms. I couldn't stop the moods from coming. I whirled across the room, picked up the phone and called Valerie.

"I'm having moods," I told her.

"What kind of moods?"

"You know, moods."

"What are you feeling?"

"Moody."

"In what ways?"

"Moody ways."

"Can you describe the moods?"

"Moods there's no music for, moods herbs can't cure, moods you can't change like your underwear; moods Val, moods."

"O.K. Maggie, O.K. I read in *Self* that sometimes it's good to pretend you're boxing when this happens, but don't hit anything real."

I hung up the phone and started boxing around the room. Peek-a-boo jab jab, right hook, left hook, combination, keep dancin', Bam. I was down for the count. I reached over to the round table skirted in blue lace, picked up the phone and hit redial.

"I have to leave," I told Valerie.

"I understand," she said without questioning, and asked to help. We planned to meet at the ditch at 2:00 a.m. She said if I had to wait longer than an hour I should go back home and we could try again the next day. Sometimes her mom was up all night pacing and that would make it hard to sneak out, she explained.

That night after I was sure the Andersons had gone to sleep, I quietly packed my things then left for the ditch to meet Valerie. I laid in the ditch with my head resting on the colorful duffel Mrs. Anderson bought for me to use as a book bag. The wind was blowing gentle and warm. I imagined myself a scarecrow dancing in the cornfield, skipping from stalk to stalk, touching the tips, making the cobs grow big and golden as the sun. I felt at peace in that ditch.

Valerie showed up on her Kawasaki at twenty-five minutes past 2:00 a.m. apologizing for being late. She explained that her mom couldn't sleep until her dad got home. He didn't get home until 1:30 a.m. and smelled of the bottle. Proper sleeping arrangements had to be made. This interfered with her schedule. It was hard to dream in her house with her sleep always getting interrupted, she said as she strapped my duffel bag down on the dirt bike.

We drove to the old motel downtown. I bought a Greyhound bus ticket to Minneapolis. Valerie pulled money out of her purse and asked for the same.

"What are you doing?" I asked her.

"I'm going too."

"But you can't."

"Why not?"

"What about your family?"

"What about yours?"

"They're not my family. I don't feel right there."

"Well I don't feel right at my house either. I want to go where I can feel at home."

I grabbed her by the hand and pulled her outside. We stood on the street corner, arguing under the dim red glow of the Motel de la Luna vacancy sign. After about five minutes, we returned to the front desk and exchanged our bus tickets for a room. We both took a key.

The room was small and decorated in solid patterns of blue and green. There was a double bed, a desk and chair with a notepad and a glitzy Motel de la Luna pen, an unfinished dresser with four drawers, an empty nightstand, and a lamp with a moth-eaten shade. Me and Val sat cross-legged on the bed in the middle of the quiet, still room. The vacancy sign blinked on and off outside the window. The red glow gave Val's face a glamorous look. I imagined her on the cover of *Vogue*, a place she would've liked to have been. This caused a big grin to break out on my face. Valerie laughed her laugh.

"This bed's comfortable," she said and bounced lightly on the mattress.

"Yeah," I agreed.

"Let's stay here forever."

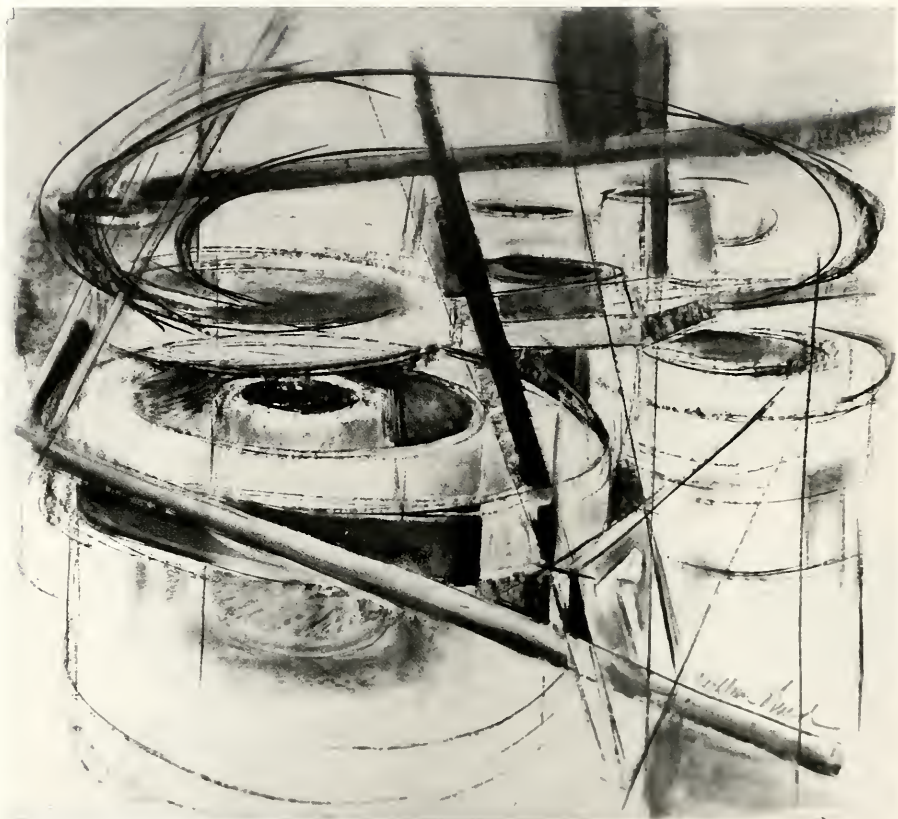
"Forever," I said. And we planned to stay forever in that room.



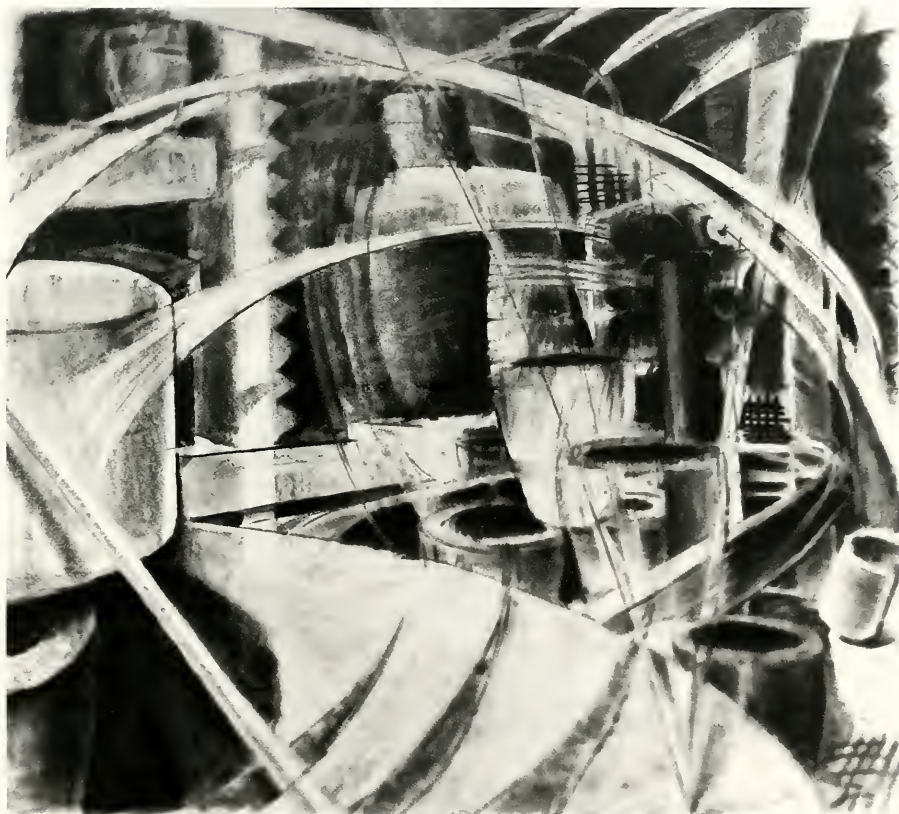
Lisa Chicoyne: *Red Dream*, mixed media: plaster, wax, fabric



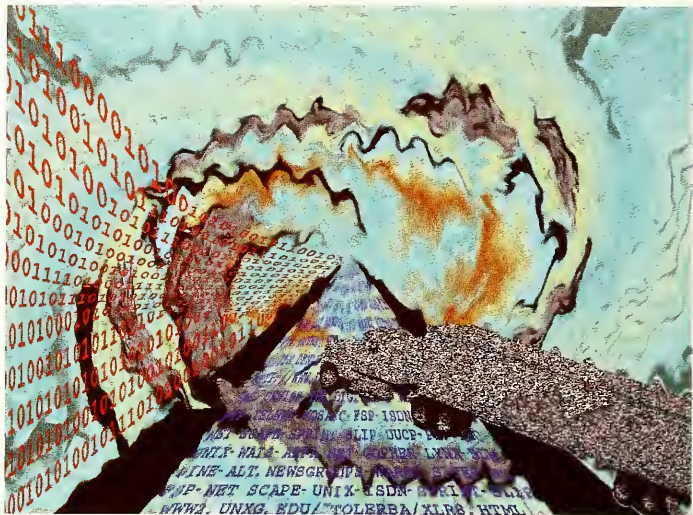
Paul Batt: *Winter Fountain*, color photograph



Kathleen Ward: *Sacred Vessels II*, charcoal on paper



Kathleen Ward: *Sacred Vessels I*, charcoal on paper



Baron Toler: *I-way*, computer generated image



Robert LaBranche: *Empty Bowl*, acrylic on canvas



Karen Ingram: *Untitled*, oil on canvas



Ben Billingsley: *A Lesson for "S,"* oil on canvas

Once Alone

Gregg Carroll

In the sickly light of institution
he lay in the bed once filled by her
and now reflected on how
a meaningless moment for one
could stand out in another's mind
like a volunteer for execution.
The comfort of touch fulfilled
like the thick cloud inhaled
by the lungs of a smoker
and he had clung to her sleep
and inadvertent attention.
Holding her, unconscious,
the obviously accepting hand
on his arm reminded him of someone
who had cared for him, more
than he had cared for being alone.
It had made all the difference.
In five hours of breathing and rolling,
she had made him as empty
as a friend can make another friend,
who has nothing, just by smiling.
He wanted her and feared the vastness
of his single bed and wished
for a grave with two corpses
who lay like spoons, warm
with no need for light or faces.



Photograph courtesy of University Archives/Jackson Library, UNCG



John H. McIntyre: *Fertility Goddess*, conte and pastel on newsprint



Kerry Horne: *Strider*, mixed media on paper



Sean McDaniel: *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas



Beth Aronson: *Who's There?*, mixed media on paper



Lisa Chicoyne: *First Shadow*, wood, newspaper, wax, fabric



Lisa Chicoyne: *Shadow*, plaster, wax, fabric

There Are Monsters Within Us

Chuck Turner

Fighting with sticks
when brothers together, feet apart

take swings, climb to treetops
and ward off not too distant

enemies, then turn on each other.
One, the old victor, with longer branch

now holding your sword, laughing
these times will be forgotten

by dinner a new mission, by nine
completed. And the new day begins

much like the one before
with newfound weapons—tree housed

safe in your hand
fit only for its breaking.



Beth Aronson: *Medici Sleeping*, charcoal on paper



Miguel Martin: *Orange Monster*, oil pastel on acetate



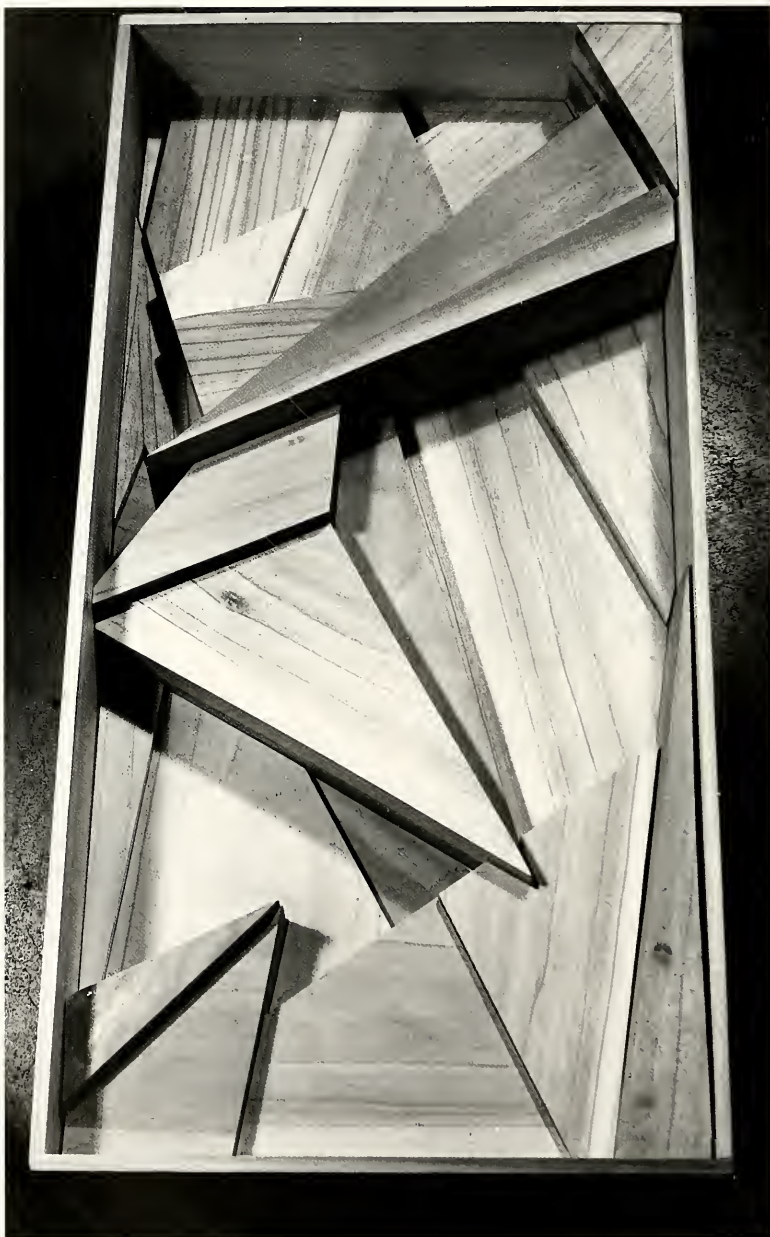
Leanne Blake: *Beavers*, charcoal and housepaint on wood panel



Roger Goldenberg: *Conversation and Dance*, oil on canvas



Ruth Stone: *Knowledge is Pow*, painted Hydrocal on wood



Marian Humphrey: *Untitled*, wood

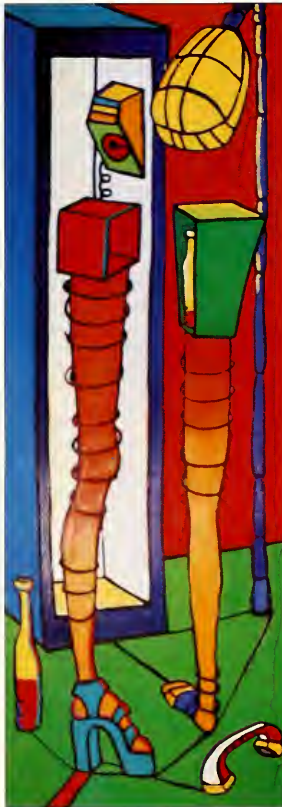


Paul Batt: *Nobody Loves Me*, photograph

Texas Rattle

Lenna Nicole Burnette

Blitz rod strives
for northern gutters.
Bends heavily
while southern shutters
crack the back of evening.
Cheeks packed full
with night chilled soil
as cactus blossoms
coax a sneeze.
Blows dust 'round corners
to sleep on baby's bones.



Leanne Blake: *Hold Please,*
oil on wood panel



Jack Thomson: *Boingy Jumping*, photograph

From Water

Marisa Taylor

I was born under a bad omen. The lunar eclipse made everyone in town crazy. Mothers fed their children raw eggs to keep them safe, and the school, bank and grocery store shut down leaving yellow chalk crosses on their doors. They told Mom not to have me. They said to put paper bags over her watermelon-sized tummy to keep me from coming out. The ladies in town strung rosaries over Mom's door praying I wouldn't come out on the day when newborn babies resembled two-headed monsters, but I wanted out. Mother was so embarrassed that I was already disobeying her and the town that she didn't send for Dad at work. She just squatted over the toilet. If it hadn't been for Miss Inez Castillo who happened to need an extra egg for her youngest child, and came in and saw my feet dangling out of Mom's uterus, we probably both would have died. I remained half in and half out of Mom for an hour until we got to the hospital in the closest city.

Once there, Mother said I slipped right out of her womb. That it was even a comfort the way my lubricated body oozed out. She said it was like swimming at midnight when water feels like satin sheets. I came into the world with the breath of salt and memory of waves. The moment they poured me in her arms she slid me back and forth and knew I came fresh from the ocean of God. My birth certificate said Floriza

Maurizia Menchoa, but everyone called me Flo.

The whole town came to visit. First to see if I had been born double-headed as the rumor had said. Then they came to see my eyes. No one in our small border town had ever seen eyes my color. I remember all of them touching my eyes as I blinked so they only felt the softness of my lids. Never before had they seen eyes with blue and green and yellow flecks shaped exactly like a half moon. Miss Inez Castillo, who felt it was her duty to stay until my mother completely recovered, commented how even if the rest of my face was ugly, I'd at least have brilliant eyes. Mom was too worn out to really notice.

After my birth Mother swore God had touched her life, and the Pentecostal woman sharing the sterile pastel yellow room made no hesitation in converting Mom once the visitors all left. Mom ate up that lady's every spoken tongue. She abandoned her traditional Catholicism with the speed of the Pope's divine intervention. Everything changed. She put away her rosaries, postcards of Saint Jude and Blessed Virgin de Guadalupe candles. Mom stopped cooking with jalapeños because something that hot had to come from hell. Her Pentecostal insanity knew no bounds. While my brothers, already on the brink of adolescence, tanned and grew strong on sandwiches that tasted like the salt of their skin, Mother melted into a shapeless

glob of putty in the hands of her new religion. I sucked on a tit, excited and heaving over the evil sins of life. It was too late for the strapping boys, but not for a lucid little girl. That was when she banned music and dancing from my life.

Dad worked too hard to notice. The meals on the table when he got home and his ability to provide food for six kids and a wife, fed into his macho image of life. He loved me, but his concerns for my development slipped through his fingers like the bits of sawdust he worked with. Only on Sundays when the town came out and sat sucking on lemon slices sprinkled with salt, talking about the impromptu *pachanga* they had in Jose Carlos' yard, did he regret my stern upbringing, but it was too late. I turned into a teenager in pale yellow dresses under Mother's grooming. Everything I did satisfied God and Mom. I didn't think anything of it. I accepted my life as God's plan. The way Mother described it.

Mother was so sure of my being there that she would pray in a passionate fury and fall straight back from the miracle of God, knowing I'd catch her before her head hit the floor and cracked like a nut. In school, I was normal everyday Flo. A little quiet, but normal. I had girls to walk to school with and eat lunch with, but nothing further. Mother scolded me if I brought anyone home. She told me those girls grew from the lizards that crawled on our screens and I was the moth they were looking for with long dry tongues. I didn't argue. Instead, I learned silence. I learned to camouflage myself against the steam of my cooking. I glided in and out of rooms with the quiet sensation of a butterfly's scream, sometimes going unnoticed until one of my brothers gasped, startled to see their sister's eyes shining in the shadows of the room. When they complained or commented on my ghostly presence, Mom just smiled. She believed I saw visions. My silence and graceful steps were the result of angels carrying me through the house to watch over her saved soul. My brothers avoided me, but somehow I always seemed to appear silent and soft, moving in and

out of the house searching for an answer to a question I had not yet formed.

It is said that the moon tilted in a funny position the day Zolita asked me to sneak into El Matador in the city with the other girls from the barrio. They say that the fishermen were turning over from vicious waves and whales were jumping out of the violence in scared magnificence. Maybe that accounts for the reason I said yes. Then again, maybe not.

I didn't have the slightest idea what to wear to a club. I knew I had to pass for twenty-one. The covers of magazines I saw in grocery store lines showed women with long blonde hair and too-small dresses. My brothers hid posters of women in little leather skirts and spiked tops. All of these women spilled out of themselves like dough rising over the pan's rim. None of it belonged to me and my world. For a moment I doubted my decision, but we didn't have a phone to tell Zolita otherwise so I bit my lip and looked in my closet once more.

I decided on a hand-me-down sundress that Mom deemed too risqué. The little orange straps looked like flames against my brown skin. In a split second of rash madness, I cut the cotton skirt of my dress. The scissors ripped into the dress with sharp "z" sounds as I heard Mom praying and Dad snoring in the room next door. I turned myself into my own fairy godmother. My dress took on a mystical life of its own. The brilliant blaze of orange kicked way above the knee and nestled into my waist. It was the witch's creation I always wanted to wear.

Sneaking out was easy. The only girl in the house got the only bedroom. I remember not even being scared. The screen squeaked weakly, and a gap in the window let me hop into the darkness of the night. Zolita and the girls met me under the only street light in our complex. We looked over fake ID's deciding who looked like who, giggling over all of it. Monica had her older sister's car, and off we flew. The muffler spit out smoke each time she hit the gas. An older man turned and stared at us at a red light. A lady drove too slow. We passed a blue Mercedes.

We were there.

The guy at the door inspected our ID's closely. He even smelled the ink. He looked at all of us. I was the last one. I tried not to catch his eye, but I did. He held it for five seconds while I counted. Then he stepped away from the door, and we bounced in giving each other knowing little smiles.

Everything was so different and so like I imagined. The darkness, the smoke, the men draped over the bar, the women staking their domains with straight backs slightly curved from the extremity of their heels and the music. What was I doing here? It was how Mom described hell. The other girls marched in the formation of ducks to the bar, ready to exhaust their twenty-one-year-old year old status. I wasn't going to go that far so I took a seat. Everyone looked like they knew what they were doing. A woman in the corner pulled a misplaced thread off a man's lapel. The confidence. Groups of men and women stood around gawking at each other and groping with their eyes. A man at my right held his drink too low and the straw caught in a loop of his sweater vest. It hung there on his tummy while he gyrated with the music. The foolishness. A man dressed in dark clothes with painfully large pupils took the empty seat to my right. He looked like the devil seated next to me, scaled and decorated with lust.

"Do you want to dance?"

"What?" I stammered. "Well, I don't know how."

He shrugged his shoulders at my response, and his large tapered fingers lifted me from my seat and led me to the floor. The music got quicker and louder the closer I got. It pounded, and I felt wrong inside the crowded square of soaked shirts and dampened hair. I wasn't sure. I never did this before. I was shielded from this. The devil partner shook. He weaved in and out of air. Suddenly, I heard an explosion and I felt the tremors of music. An earthquake cracked through me. First my feet. They moved. One, two, three. One, two, three. Then my hips. They rocked. Back and forth.

Finally my chest. It responded. In and out. In and out. I swayed.

The beats hit rough, but my body caught them smoothly. They became more vicious only to feel the reprimand and taming of my body. My skirt swung like it was still hanging on the line and the material brushed my thighs. I felt like the beginning of a storm.

"I thought you said you couldn't dance," the devil said with his pupils getting larger.

"I never have before."

"Ay mama, you look like you came straight into this world dancing. Like a possessed woman."

It was then that I knew I was beautiful. Not because of the way the devil looked me deep in the eyes or because anyone told me so, but because I thought I was. I allowed the music to whisper, chuckle and scream in my ears. My life of accepting obedience flooded out of me. Under the canopy of smoke and carnal musk of colognes and perfumes, I was no longer trapped like a caged circus lion. I moved. My heart beat to the rhythm of each song, and to stop dancing would be to stop living. Pretty soon, a crowd of people gathered around me, watching and clapping. I saw them through the smoky film of my fallen hair. My devil partner disappeared into the crowd, and only my tireless body and smiling glow kept them standing there cheering in amazement.

"She's mesmerizing. Isn't she?" I heard one man say.

"She moves like a hurricane I once saw in Florida," another woman said.

A man with round glasses and a blue satin shirt already wet with sweat under the armpits began dancing with me. He twisted his waist and waved his arms up and down like he would have had he been pounding nails. Some people pointed and most of the crowd left, but he didn't last. I wore him out. He took off wheezing, and another man took his place. The new man's moustache barely showed up above the thickness of his lips. The blackness in his eyes looked like they said I'm going to outdance you,

woman, but he didn't. He left, and a man with snakeskin cowboy boots followed. There was a line of men and bets placed at the bar. They took out bills, waved them excitedly at this funny scene, sized up and decided which man had stamina to outlast the madwoman in the middle of the floor. Hefty men, athletes, regulars, weightlifters, ranchers and thieves all tried to outdance me, but each song sizzled in me like butter on a hot skillet. Nobody stopped me. My orange dress drenched with the sweat of my continually moving body looked like a campfire put out. I still smiled. In all my life, I never felt the exhilaration of noise and the control of my body. I almost scared myself.

It went on like that all night until the lights went on and the music stopped. I almost fainted from the shock and abrupt ending, but my first partner took me by the small of my back.

"I knew you could dance. All I had to do was look in your eyes. They're wild."

He handed me tickets to another club called Boccacio's. He promised I'd be a hit and that if I went tomorrow night there would be a dance contest.

Either out of jealousy or as a result of too much liquor, the girls said nothing about my crazed dancing. It was as if they hadn't seen me. In fact, I seemed to slip back into being invisible inside the car. They talked about their ears ringing from the loudness of the club and the woman with a skirt short enough to see her panties. "Didn't you see? They were leopard skin panties. Silky. Even looked dirty." Monica cursed the lateness, and how her sister would beat her with a brush if the car wasn't back in

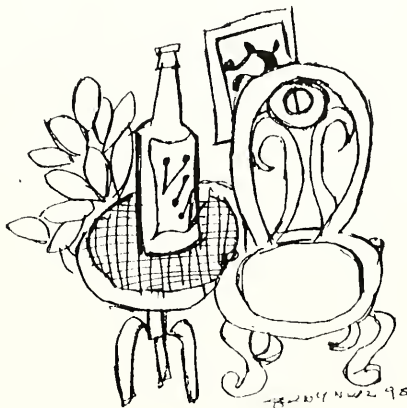
ten minutes, the time her sister's boyfriend got off work. Zolita talked about the only cute man being the bartender, and he was too busy to look her way. None of them mentioned my dancing, the line of men waiting to wear me out, the placing of bets or the odd scent of fire and smoke ascending from my pores.

We all got off at the street lamp, and walked to our homes. The early morning sun began to crack and the gap in my window let me hop into the new light of my room. The June bugs already started to calm down, preparing themselves for the heat of the day and protecting themselves from the wakening birds.

their stillness signaled morning just as sure as the sun. I knew in an hour Mom would be up praying with pillow-flattened hair and the bathrobe I gave her last year to replace the one she wore every morning since my birth. It would be time for me to begin preparing breakfast for the guys so I had enough time to dress for school. I closed my eyes and thought about the night. The life I felt. The way my blood ran fast inside me. I thought about it with a smile I never felt on my face before.

The morning passed like any other except that I couldn't hold my feet steady. Even Dad noticed that I looked a little uneasy. It made him uncomfortable, and he left the table without finishing the breakfast I prepared. My brothers eyed me suspiciously. I was sure they knew, but no one said anything. It was mother who made the comment, "Que paso?" She got so close I could feel her breath mixing with mine. "Are you sick?"

"No, Mama. I'm fine. I'm going to be late for school."



I did feel a little bit guilty about disobeying Mom. Mom had lived through me, sure that I was the chosen one. I was the one that saved her soul. When someone came over to sip juice and talk about politics, as they often did in our small town, Mom threw up her hands and said she didn't know anything, but Flo knows all about everything. Everyone knew to speak to Mom they had to speak to me or vice versa. I deciphered Mom's foreign tongues as wanting a bag of grain to make bread or as ordering a cake for my brother's wedding or offering condolences when Carmen Lucero's husband died. People in town accepted her crazy unknown ways in the same way they accepted the superstition that comets make hair stay black for one more day.

At home I felt guilty, but at school I couldn't concentrate. The thought of dancing consumed me. I kept asking to go to the bathroom so I could close the door and watch myself dance in the mirror. I saw my devil partner's eyes in mine. They were a little darker, a little larger with the pupil attracting all of the attention. The large pupil looked like a black heart torn out of a puma dying in the jungle. Each time I looked in them I hated them, but I wanted to see them encouraging me to dance, to lose myself in my bliss.

The teachers watched me twitching in my seat while my shoulders rolled to the music in my head. If I closed my eyes I saw my body moving. I could smell the warm liquor of the bar and the smoke of the endless cigarettes in the men's mouths. If I opened my eyes everything became the blur of disco lights. By the end of the day, I couldn't even hold my

pencil. I used it as an urgent tool to keep the beat. I took out the ticket to Boccacio's. I waved it in the air trying to see if it spoke to me.

Rain poured wildly when the school bell rang. I waited at the window to see if it might let up, but it gushed like it would never stop. I resigned myself to soaking and dashing home alone, when I spotted Zolita. I always recognized her by the big bows she wore in her hair. Her mother sold those bows, always with loops and extra ribbons hanging off them, in the city on Saturday afternoons at the big flea market.

"Zolita, I'm going to Boccacio's tonight. Do you want to come?" I hadn't planned on asking anyone, but since she invited me dancing last night I went ahead asked her to come tonight.

"Flo, you're as crazy as your mom." She

said with her cow eyes rolling around her very brown heart-shaped head. "First off, Flo, we don't have a car. Second, and I hate to break it to you, but Jose Carlos' youngest son told Miss Castillo he danced with you last night, and weren't you too young to dance in a club like that even if your mom allowed it. You better get home quick, Hot Pants."

I realized that there was no way this news escaped Mother. Miss Inez Castillo would walk over to the post office and

casually tell Berto the news, and add that wasn't it funny that Flo of all people would be in one of those sleazy clubs on the outskirts of the red light district. Berto, in the middle of his route, would stop to drink a margarita with the mayor like he has done since they were barely getting hair on their face. He'd tell the mayor how Flo ran off with Jose Carlos' son to the red light district. The mayor would get upset and tell the store clerk how children in this town have gone to the devil.



The clerk would ask why, and the mayor would lean over and say real quietly, like they were planning a revolt, that I was spotted doing favors for men in the back of a club in the red light district. Mom would march in, moving her knees up real high and buy milk like she did every Thursday. The clerk, wiping the sweat off his wrinkled forehead, would tell her how he feels it is his duty to inform an honorable woman and pillar of the community that her daughter has taken to prostitution, and if they need the cash maybe the town could help out. Before long, the whole town would be out shucking corn and speculating about my wild doings.

Gossip spreads faster in this town than the juice that slips down your hand while peeling an orange. My body felt heavy. The water caught in my hair pulled my hair back. The weight of what I did sunk in. The way I snuck out in a short dress. The many men I danced with. The way I was ready to do it again. My skin still smelled like fire. It only took me a second to realize that when the rain hit my skin it turned to steam. It scalded. The rain fell. Never before in the history of the town had there been rain so angry that it turned a girl's skin to steam. I opened my arms to try and catch the wind like a sail, but whistling steam poured and hissed from the inside of my arms.

I stood there for a long time steaming. The young flesh of my skin turned soggy with open pores like a toad on the bottom of a formaldehyde barrel. Hot moisture singed my body until I glowed the red of a coal in a barbecue pit. Mr. Hernandez saw me first. Maybe he smelled the burned hair and charred skin, or maybe the incredibly warm rain erupting from an unexpectedly open sky caused him to venture out during his nap time. Whatever it was, he came, and just after he came, the rest of the town opened their moth-eaten screen doors and found me jumping up and down. The town, at first mute from shock, did nothing. A few women dropped to their knees crossing themselves—*En el nombre del Padre, del hijo y del Espiritu Santo*. But no one knew what to

do about a girl incinerating from rain.

Mother came out. Rollers in her hair. She carried a large blanket and draped it over me. I dropped and rolled. Steam was still escaping from the blanket. I stopped. Suddenly, everyone noticed the smell in the air. It grew like the hibiscus that sprouted between some of the vegetable fields. The rain stopped quietly, leaving puddles with little worms swimming inside and clouds of mosquitoes circling around the papaya trees. Everyone wanted to say something. They all opened their mouths, ready to discuss the strange events, but words didn't come out. For a long time they just stood there staring, opening and closing their mouths, trying to talk. They did this for about an hour. Then the women realized dinner needed to get cooked, and the men went in to listen to the news.

Mother took me inside. She forced tangerines and mangoes down me. She gave me cool sugar water and iced my back. If I thought about dancing I'd start to get warm, and Mom would rub salt all over me. We did this all night, and by morning there wasn't a pore in my body not filled with salt grains.

"I'm sorry Mother," I said.

"Shh! Always a strange girl. Always a strange girl."

Life went on as normal, except Mom enrolled me in dance lessons in the city. Every Saturday she'd take me over to the city and watch through a glass window. I lost myself just the same. Once in a while between leaps and stretches, I'd glance through to see Mom staring at me with a Bible on her lap opened up to the passage that she interpreted to say dancing is a form of a prayer.



Robert Carter: *I Free I*, marble



Photograph courtesy of University Archives/Jackson Library, UNCG

Untitled

Anna Akhmatova

Я научилась просто, мудро жить,
Смотреть на небо и молиться Богу,
И долго перед вечером бродить,
Чтоб утомить ненужную тревогу.

Когда шуршат в овраге лопухи
И никнет гроздь рябины желто-красной,
Слагаю я веселые стихи
О жизни тленной, тленной и прекрасной.

Я возвращаюсь. Лижет мне ладонь
Пушистый кот, мурлыкает умильной,
И яркий загорается огонь
На башенке озерной лесопильни.

Лишь изредка прорезывает тишь
Крик аиста, слетевшего на крышу.
И если в дверь мою ты постучишь,
Мне кажется, я даже не услышу.

1912

Translation from the original poem by Anna Akhmatova
Yulia Borodyanskaya

I learned to live a wise and simple life,
Look at the sky and say my prayers,
And wander for long hours at night
To wear out useless grief and worries.

When burdocks rustle in a deep ravine
Admiring a bunch of rowan berries,
I'm writing happily about earthly life
And its mortality-inspired beauties.

I'm coming back. A furry, lazy cat
Sits on my lap, and purrs its soft affection,
And fire, bright and restless, burns on top
Of the sawmill tower, lights a deep backwater.

A stork flies down to my roof.
It breaks the quietness with lively screams of care.
And if you once came knocking, where is the proof
That I would hear you?



Jon Smith: *Mattock*, steel and wood



Jon Smith: *Equivalence*, steel and wood

About the Judge: Fiction Dr. Charles Tisdale

Charles Tisdale has been a member of the faculty of the English Department at UNCG since 1967. He studied as an undergraduate at Sewanee, and completed his doctoral work at Princeton with a concentration in medieval language and literature, especially Chaucer. However, Dr. Tisdale has never thought of himself as a specialist, but has consistently branched out into the major European literatures of all periods. He loves to teach undergraduates, particularly the 200 level surveys, Chaucer, and medieval writers in translation.

Dr. Tisdale has involved himself in many areas of campus life during his twenty-eight years of teaching at UNCG. He was a member of the faculty committee which established the Residential College, and his contributions over fifteen years are memorialized there by the naming of a basement room after him. From 1985-1988 he survived a three year stint in Mossman Building as Dean of Academic Advising, the last holder of the office to be honored by that title. Dr. Tisdale is currently running a vigorous campaign for Chair of the Faculty Senate which, if successful, should install him in that sinecure in the thirtieth year of his tenure in the institution which he has so attentively served. His name is associated with two faculty initiatives, the "Tisdale Amendment" in 1971 which espoused teaching as the primary role of a faculty member at UNCG, and the "Tisdale Memorandum" in 1994 which he has high hopes will eventually revitalize morale and the quality of life among students, faculty, and administration. It has been said Dr. Tisdale's demeanor is "calm and quiescent," but that he is apt to "erupt like a volcano" every quarter of a century or so.

Our judge's credentials for the fiction contest are noteworthy. He began his writing career as a poet at the age of eight when, in the second grade at Ellis Avenue Elementary in Orangeburg, SC, he produced an award winning poem entitled "Old King Cotten." Dr. Tisdale chose heroic couplets for his first sally into the muse's domain: "That old King Cotten, coming round the bend,/Loaded on the truck, headed for the gin," reads the first two lines. His next effort was as a junior at Sewanee when he amazed his Horace professor by composing a bucolic effusion of mowing grass in pherecratic meter with a trochaic substitution in the second foot. His most vaunted achievement here was the creation of an anachronistic circumlocution, *machina quae mandet gramen*, for the subject of the poem, which is translated "a machine which chews grass."

After this metorious achievement, Dr. Tisdale did not write

anything, except term papers, for the next eight years, and, of course, one dissertation. At age twenty-nine he again tried his hand at poetry, and after a five year apprenticeship finally wrote a "real" poem. He has the distinct honor of having his first poem accepted by the *Texas Quarterly*, only to remain unpublished because of the discontinuing of the journal by the Texas Legislature during the oil crisis of the early seventies.

However, Dr. Tisdale was able to include this success as an acceptance in his cover letters to other magazines, and eventually editors began to print his work in such publications as the *Antioch Review*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Queen's Quarterly*, *The Chicago Review*, and one was even posted on the buses of the Mount Holyoke Transit Authority in Boston for a summer.

Dr. Tisdale began writing fiction because he became discouraged with the loss of a poetic readership in our culture and also when, in the aftermath of a trip to Nicaragua in 1983, the idea for a novel wafted through the curtains of his bedroom one May evening like a seamless lover. However, because this first attempt at a full-length fiction was so autobiographical, involving international espionage, AK-47's, the CIA, and an English Professor, he was unsuccessful in finding a publisher.

Never one to give up, however, Dr. Tisdale decided to return to the Middle Ages for his next attempt. That work has proved more fertile, as the initial novel in a trilogy set in Anglo-Saxon England was published in early 1994. The title is *Month of Swallows* and it can be found in the UNCG library or purchased at the Bookstore. Dr. Tisdale sent the sequel, *Holy Isle*, off to his British publisher a month ago, and is now busily revising the final volume, *Book of Glass*. He wonders what the title for the entire trilogy should be, but thinks he might just settle on a simple one: NORTHUMBRIA. Any suggestions?

About the Judge: Art Margaret Shearin

Margaret Shearin graduated with a BA from Wake Forest University in 1981, and got her MFA from East Carolina University School of Arts in 1988. She has written for the once-existent magazine *ArtVu*, and *Art Papers*. Her reviews have appeared in *Sculpture* magazine. Currently, she is an artist and writer living in Winston-Salem, NC where she writes a weekly column for *TRIADStyle*.



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